

Cleaning Flooded Heating Systems

- Any heating system exposed to flooding should be professionally inspected, cleaned, and reconditioned before reuse. Floodwater may have damaged heating equipment and undermined chimneys. If chimney cracks or leaks go unrepaired, your family is at risk of fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you smell natural gas – which has a distinctive, putrid odor – leave your home and contact your utility company or a service person. Do not use open flames in the area.
- Before the service person arrives, you can:
 - Turn off the fuel and power to flooded units as a safety measure.
 - Remove mud and debris from the furnace housing and inside the chimney.
 - Leave things like inspection of oil storage tanks and cleaning of motors, blowers, and other flooded parts to the professional. Flood insurance and federal disaster assistance programs usually will help replace flooded gas and oil appliances, including furnaces.
 - If the heater is jacketed, you can clean out all mud between the stove and the outside casing. The casing may be removed to give working space.
 - Take the smoke pipe out of the chimney and reach through the thimble to remove any mud from the lower portion of the chimney flue. This assures a draft for the fire.
- If you have an oil-burning system, have a professional:
 - Inspect the storage tank for opened seams to make sure water and dirt have not entered.
 - Clean and recondition the electric motor, burners, blowers, fuel pump, and gears. Flooded fuel filters should be replaced.
 - Be certain that the fan motor, electric ignition systems, and wiring are completely clean and dry before you turn on the electricity.
 - Dismantle the burner and clean all parts with kerosene. Inspect and clean the air blower. Replace fuel filters and clean and dry out the fuel pump. Remove housings that enclose gears and clean the gears thoroughly with kerosene. Grit in the gears will cause undue wear.

- If you have a natural gas or propane system have a professional:
 - Check to see if water leaked into the controls or pressure regulator.
 - Clean and recondition all flooded equipment, including burner elements, electric controls, and regulators.
 - Replace severely flooded electric blower motors.
- If you have an electrical system, have a professional:
 - Clean mud and debris from electric baseboard heating fixtures, being careful not to damage heating equipment.
 - Clean and recondition all working parts.
- If you have a chimney:
 - A cracked, clogged, or leaky chimney can cause fires or carbon monoxide poisoning. Be sure you check your chimney for dirt, debris, and leaks before lighting the furnace or a fire.
 - If flood damage has occurred, have a mason do an inspection and make repairs.
 - Most chimneys have a foundation in the ground. If the chimney looks like it has settled or tilted, examine the footing to see whether it has been undermined.
 - Have the chimney rebuilt if it has settled badly or is broken where it passes through the floor or roof.

Adapted from resource material developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Service entitled "The Disaster Handbook for Extension Agents"